

*CARMEL, NY* – Rep. John Hall (NY-19) highlighted a significant veteran's casework resolution and the need to create a presumption of service connection for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to improve veterans' access to benefits and healthcare when he met today with Howard Berkowitz, a Vietnam veteran from Highland Mills, NY.

Through Rep. Hall's efforts to expedite Mr. Berkowitz's longstanding backlogged case, he received a rating of 100 percent service connection for disabilities that will now include PTSD.

Mr. Berkowitz enlisted in the Army, served a three year tour and experienced stressors in Vietnam that were difficult to corroborate decades later. Although he received benefits for diabetes caused by Agent Orange exposure, he was unable to prove that his diagnosis of PTSD was connected to his service in Vietnam. This led to a lower disability rating and smaller benefits. Even with a diagnosis of PTSD from his doctor, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) took two years to acknowledge they could not verify Howard's stressors were from his service in Vietnam. Mr. Berkowitz then did his own research, enlisted Rep. Hall's help to expedite the case, and also provided more stressor documentation to the VA.

"I am proud to have helped Mr. Berkowitz receive the benefits he earned through his service in Vietnam," said Rep. Hall. "However, the delay in his case is deeply disappointing and illustrates the problem at the VA. I am committed to working with the VA and veterans groups to streamline the claim process so that veterans can count on a timely and accurate decision from the VA the first time."

Rep. Hall said Mr. Berkowitz's case further underscores the difficulty veterans have experienced in bringing forth claims for PTSD, and added, "It is for veterans like Howard that I introduced my COMBAT PTSD Act to give a presumption of service connected disability to veterans diagnosed with PTSD. If my bill passes, then veterans with PTSD will be able to receive healthcare and benefits without having to navigate the complicated, arcane VA claims process."

Eager to see improvement in the PTSD service connection and lessen the backlog for VA compensation, Mr. Berkowitz stands as a staunch supporter of Rep. Hall's oversight efforts as Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs. "I thank Congressman Hall for his help on my case, and for tackling this issue in Washington. Veterans in the Hudson Valley should be proud to know that Congressman Hall is standing up for them."

Rep. Hall has made addressing the VA claims backlog his first priority for his subcommittee this year, holding a number of hearings to address the issue. This is to follow up on his actions in the previous Congress to introduce and help pass H.R. 5892, the Veterans Disability Benefits Claims Modernization Act, which required the VA to modernize into a 21st century, veterans friendly organization, and was the most comprehensive reform to the VA in a generation.

In response to Rep. Hall's COMBAT PTSD Act, the VA has announced that it will be changing its policy on PTSD, but has yet to finalize the regulations to do so. The VA is currently reviewing public comments on the rule, and should publish the final regulation soon.